What is claimed is:

1. An optical element having a plate-like shape, which comprises a light-transmitting resin and minute regions, said minute regions being dispersedly distributed in said light-transmitting resin and having a birefringence different from said light-transmitting resin, wherein at least one of said light-transmitting resin and said minute regions containe at least one luminescent material.

2. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said at least one luminescent material is a fluorescent material that absorbs any one of ultraviolet light and visible light and emits visible light.

3. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said at least one luminescent material is a phosphorescent material that absorbs any one of ultraviolet light and visible light and emits visible phosphorescence.

4. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said minute regions are made of any one of a liquid crystal material, a material in glass state that is formed by fixing a liquid crystal phase upon cooling, and a material that is formed by crosslinking and fixing a liquid crystal phase of a liquid crystal monomer upon irradiation of energy rays.

5. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein said minute regions are made of a liquid crystal polymer that has a glass transition temperature of 50℃ or higher and exhibits a nematic liquid crystal phase at a temperature lower than the glass transition temperature of the light-transmitting resin.

6. The optical element according to claim 1, wherein the following expressions (1)-(3) are established for refractive index difference between said minute regions and said light-transmitting resin:

$0.03 \leqq \Delta n1 \leqq 0.5$ (1)

$0 \leqq \Delta n2 \leqq 0.03$ (2)

$0 \leqq \Delta n3 \leqq 0.03$ (3)

where,

$\Delta n1$: refractive index difference in an axial direction of the minute regions, along which a maximum refractive index difference occurs

$\Delta n2$: refractive index difference in an axial direction orthogonal to the axial direction along which the maximum refractive index difference occurs

$\Delta n3$: refractive index difference in an axial direction orthogonal to the axial direction along which the maximum refractive index difference occurs.

7. A polarized-light-emitting surface light source comprising an optical element having a plate-like shape and a light source that emits light of a wavelength that is capable of exciting a luminescent material contained in said optical element, said optical element comprising a light-transmitting resin and minute regions, said minute regions being dispersedly distributed in said light-transmitting resin and having a birefringence different from said light-transmitting resin, wherein at least one of said light-transmitting resin and said minute regions contains at least one luminescent material.

8. The polarized-light-emitting surface light source according to claim 7, further comprising a light guide member for guiding light emitted from said light source to said optical element, said light guide member being made of a light passing material.

9. The polarized-light-emitting surface light source according to claim 7 comprising an electroluminescence element.

10. A display unit comprising the polarized-light-emitting surface light source according to claim 7.